Internal radiotherapy to the cervix

Information for patients
This leaflet aims to help you and your family understand more about your internal radiotherapy (brachytherapy) for gynaecological cancer.

The treatment is given in the Brachytherapy Department, Rutherford Suite, Level -1 Bexley Wing. Brachytherapy uses a radioactive source held in a small pellet. The source can be placed close to the cervix and womb using a special applicator. The treatment area receives a high dose of radiation whilst the dose to surrounding normal tissue is lower.

The healthcare team looking after you will explain your treatment and the side-effects in detail. If you hear any words or phrases that you do not understand, please ask your doctor or a member of your healthcare team what it means. It does not matter how many times you ask.

**Intracavitary treatment**

This procedure is used mainly in the treatment of cervical cancer and occasionally in womb (endometrial) cancer. It is usually given after or alongside external beam radiotherapy but can be given as the main treatment.

Applicators are inserted under a spinal anaesthetic and at weekly intervals, usually for three treatments. It is usually undertaken as a day case procedure.

You will meet the brachytherapy radiographers during your external beam radiotherapy. They will explain what will happen during your brachytherapy treatment and give you an appointment for the day case unit.
Fasting Instructions

All patients should have a light evening meal.

250 ml of clear, unflavoured, still water should be drunk 2 hours before the procedure, i.e. at 06.00am for a morning procedure.

Solids and drinks containing milk should not be consumed from midnight on the day of the procedure.

What does the treatment involve?

When you arrive at the day case unit you will be asked to change into a gown and given an enema. You will be taken to the brachytherapy suite where you will be given a spinal anaesthetic. You may be given a general anaesthetic. Your doctor will discuss this with you. Once anaesthetised, the doctor will examine you.

The doctor will place small tubes into your womb (uterus) and at the top of the vagina against the cervix. These are hollow tubes. They will also put in a shield, which will give some protection to the bowel. These will be held in place with gauze packing within the vagina. A catheter will be put into your bladder.

After the doctor has inserted the tubes, you will be taken around to the recovery bay. From there you will be taken down to the CT and/or the MRI scanner where images will be taken to help plan your brachytherapy treatment. You will taken back to the brachytherapy suite. You will then have to wait for your treatment to be planned and this usually takes 2-3 hours. As the applicators are in place you will have to lie on a trolley until the treatment is complete. You are welcome to bring in a book or magazine.
During this time you will be looked after by the recovery team who will monitor any pain you will have. The radiographers will keep you informed of the approximate time of your treatment.

The Brachytherapy radiographers will connect the small applicators to the treatment machine (shown above) using a series of hollow cables, one for each tube placed in your uterus and against your cervix. The treatment machine contains a small radioactive pellet (iridium) which, when the machine is switched on, will travel down to each tube in turn. As this radioactive pellet travels along the tube it delivers a measured amount of radiotherapy to the tumour. At the end of the treatment the pellet then returns to the treatment machine.

The treatment will take approximately ten minutes. Whilst the treatment is being given, you will be in the room alone but the brachytherapy radiographers will monitor you using
a closed circuit TV. There is also a two-way intercom system so the radiographers can talk to you and you can talk to them. However, please remember to stay still at all times so that your treatment is in the right place.

A radio and CD player can be turned on, if you wish, during the treatment. You are welcome to bring your own music if you prefer.

**After the treatment**

Once your treatment is complete the radiographers will remove the applicators and packing. Depending on how much feeling you have in your legs your catheter may be removed otherwise it will be removed by the recovery nurse.

- You will be taken back to the recovery bay where you can have a drink and something to eat.
- You will be able to go home as soon as you are up and fine.
- You will need an adult to be with you overnight.
- You cannot drive for 24 hours after the procedure so someone will have to collect you from the department.

**Side-effects**

If you have also had external beam radiotherapy you may already be having some diarrhoea or cystitis but this should not get any worse. If this is your only treatment, the side-effects should be minimal but may occur up to two weeks after treatment.

The side-effects you may experience are loose or more frequent bowel movements and a burning pain on passing water.
Drinking plenty of fluids can help to reduce this. If these do not pass quickly or become severe, please contact your GP for further advice.

Radiotherapy may cause dryness, loss of elasticity and narrowing of the vagina. You may be able to help to reduce this by using a vaginal dilator after treatment has finished. The brachytherapy radiographer will discuss this further during your treatment and give you a leaflet, ‘Feminine care and your radiotherapy’. Please ask if you have not received this leaflet.

**When will I see the doctor again?**

The doctor will want to see you about 6-8 weeks after the treatment has finished. An appointment will be posted to you.

**Student radiographers**

Please be aware that the radiotherapy department is a training centre for radiographers. Both male and female students may be present on the treatment units. However, they are supervised at all times. If you do not wish students to be present during your treatment please speak to a member of staff. This will not affect your treatment or care.

**Contact numbers**

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<tr>
<th>Brachytherapy Radiographers</th>
<th>0113 206 7744 Monday to Friday 8.00am - 6.00pm</th>
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Support Services

Leeds Cancer Support

Leeds Cancer Support complements care provided by your clinical team. We offer access to information and a wide range of support, in a welcoming environment for you, your family and friends.

We can be found in the information lounges in Bexley Wing and also in the purpose built Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre.

The Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre

The Centre is on the St James’s Hospital site and offers a variety of support services including complementary and supportive therapies. These therapies include Reiki, relaxation and visualisation, hand and foot massage and many others. We also offer a weekly exercise class and a monthly support group. You can just drop in for a coffee and a chat anytime.

Contact numbers for Leeds Cancer Support

Information Lounge Level -2 Radiotherapy Department
Open from 8.00am - 6.00pm. Tel: (0113) 206 7603

Information Centre Level 1 Outpatients Department
Open from 9.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: (0113) 206 8816

Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre
Open from 10.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: (0113) 206 6498

All the above services can be emailed on:
leedsth-tr.cancersupport@nhs.net
National Support Organisations

Macmillan Cancer Support
Freephone: 0808 808 0000, 8.00am to 8.00pm seven days a week. A textphone service for deaf and hard of hearing people is also available. Textphone: 18001 0808 808 0000
Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

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We also invest in prevention to enable people to live healthy and more active lives; delivering healthier futures for us all.

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